DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 393 EA 014 434

TITLE	Principal Selection. The Best of ERIC on Educational Management. Number 66.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Apr 82
CONTRACT	400-78-0007
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 (free).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Characteristics; Administrator Qualifications; *Administrator Selection; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Interviews; Job Applicants; Networks; *Principals; Simulation
IDENTIFIERS	Assessment Centers

ABSTRACT

Annotations of 12 articles and a research report discuss procedures for selecting principals and other school administrators and examine the hiring process from the viewpoints of both the candidates and those doing the hiring. Three articles describe model selection processes and note the problems involved in job interviews, letters of recommendation, and impulsive hiring decisions. Two articles and a special journal issue report on assessment centers, including that of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and look at the simulation techniques used in the centers. Principal selection from the candidate's viewpoint is presented in three further articles, one narrating a day of interviewing for a fictitious applicant and the others raising questions about "hidden agendas" and "old boy networks" in the hiring process. One article describes how a British Columbia (Canada) school system develops administrators from within the district, and an article and the research report review the factors and characteristics of candidates emphasized by administrators in selecting principals. (RW)

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THE BEST OF ERIC ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Number 66, April 1982

The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give educators easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

Principal Selection

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

Principal Selection

1 **Bowser, John D.** "A Story about Nervous Nancy or Ideas for Interviewing Administrators." *Clearing House*, 54, 2 (October 1980), pp. 89-92. EJ 233 523.

Ever wonder what the principal selection process is like from the viewpoint of a candidate? In this article, Bowser provides one such view by narrating the experiences of an apparently fictitious "Nancy Long" during her daylong interview for a position as assistant principal. In the process, Bowser outlines some valuable ideas for conducting a principal interview session.

Nancy files an application for the position, including a narrative explaining why she would like to become an assistant principal. Nancy and the seven other candidates are requested to meet for the interview process, which is scheduled for a Saturday in the district administration building. Following an introduction and explanation by the superintendent, Nancy undergoes her first interview, conducted by a junior high school principal, a university professor, and a parent.

Next, she is given a written exercise. Several short-answer questions test her basic knowledge of the district's operation. Four essay questions ask her to describe effective discipline, the problems of junior high school education, and her ideas on teacher evaluations. Late in the morning, Nancy is interviewed again, this time by another junior high school principal, a junior high teacher, and a district administrator.

Following a "fairly relaxed" lunch, all the candidates meet again in a "Large Group Interaction Session," during which the superintendent asks questions and the candidates respond both to the questions and to each other's answers. Finally, the superintendent closes the session by explaining how the hiring decision will be made.

2 **Bruce, C. A.** "A Program for Preparing Principals." *Education Canada*, 16, 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 35-37. EJ 149 325.

Some school districts seem to be perennially searching outside the district for the perfect building administrator. Other districts approach the principal selection process in a casual manner and end up making some big mistakes.

The Kamloops (British Columbia) school system, though, has fallen into neither of these traps. This district has a well-developed program for identifying and developing its own potential elementary school administrators, which Bruce here describes.

Each January, nominations for the "executive development program" are sought from teachers, principals, and central administrators. Some of these nominees are selected for participation in an extensive screening process, which is conducted in cooperation with the University of British Columbia. Candidates are first given a series of tests and questionnaires and then are placed in simulated situations as principals. "Role playing, written exercises and individual interviews follow over the next two or three days and marks from all the exercises are assembled to establish a complete profile" of each candidate.

The profiles are used to select the candidates who will take part in the district's principal training program. In the first two years of this program, candidates are released from part of their teaching duties to serve as administrative interns in elementary schools. Candidates also receive training outside the school and are encouraged to work toward their master's degree in educational administration.

In the third and fourth years, the candidates act as administrative assistants, a position, Bruce explains, that is similar to vice-principals. Candidates may be appointed to a principalship at any time during this final phase, but are usually appointed at the end of their fourth year. Although this program is expensive, Bruce explains, the district feels that its benefits far outweigh its costs.

3 **Bryant, B. J.; Lawlis, Parker; Nicholson, Everett; and Maher, Batt P.** *Employment Factors Superintendents Use in Hiring Administrators for Their School Districts. ASCUS Research Report.* Madison, Wisconsin: Association for School, College, and University Staffing, 1978. 16 pages. ED 198 616.

What qualities do superintendents believe are important in applicants for administrative positions? What kinds of screening factors do superintendents prefer to use when choosing administrators? And who, in practical terms, actually makes the final hiring decisions?

These questions and many others were answered by a small, nationwide sample of public school superintendents surveyed by Bryant and colleagues. In this document, these authors detail the

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findings of this study and discuss the implications of some of the survey's results.

The single most important source of administrative candidates continues to be college and university placement bureaus. Promotion within the district, however, was also highly rated. Personal contacts and letters of inquiry are also significant sources of applicants, while newspaper ads and commercial agencies are apparently rarely used.

Three-fourths of the responding superintendents rated "humanism" as a highly important quality in candidates. Other highly ranked candidate qualities were previous administrative experience, knowledge of administration, personal appearance, and ability to control students. College grade point average, perhaps surprisingly, was the lowest rated candidate quality.

The most important characteristics of applicants in personal interviews, according to 80 percent of the superintendents, is the ability to respond to questions concerning school administration. Self-confidence and poise were also highly rated, followed by the appearance of being genuinely interested in the position and facility for verbal communication. When asked who, in practical terms, makes the final selection for administrative positions, 60 percent indicated the superintendent, whereas less than one-fourth indicated the school board.

4 **Howes, Kimball L.** "The Hidden Agenda." *NASSP Bulletin,* 62, 416 (March 1978), pp. 100-106. EJ 173 586.

All interviews for administrative positions are, in theory, unbiased and honest. "There are no 'favorite sons' or strong inside candidates," says Howes. "Everybody starts with an equal opportunity, gets measured by the same yardstick, and the best person wins."

Unfortunately, Howes estimates, in seven out of ten cases there is a "hidden agenda" at work. "What this means is that the superintendent and/or board have actually made up their minds prior to the final interviews." Many candidates end up being the victims of a "charade staged by the school district for public relations purposes." In this savvy article, Superintendent Howes exposes this "most pervasive of all unpublicized factors" for the benefit of young and uninitiated candidates for administrative positions.

It is difficult for an outside applicant to tell whether an interview situation is *bona fide.* Some experienced applicants, Howes reports, develop an "intuitive awareness" about interview situations or are tipped off by the superficial nature of the interviewers' questions. Districts that mean business will often defray at least part of the applicant's traveling expenses and will treat candidates very well. The district's use of a consultant in the selection process can also be an indicator. If university professors are used, for example, "a logical assumption can be that strong candidates from their universities will be given preferential treatment."

5 **Lund, D. R.** "Selecting a Principal." *NASSP Bulletin,* 61, 412 (December 1977), pp. 59-61. EJ 169 766.

Before seeking potential candidates for the principalship, the superintendent—in concert with the future principal's constituent groups—should consider the position that needs to be filled and the kind of person needed to fill it. More specifically, says Lund, those responsible for selecting a principal should first identify the broad goals and objectives of the school, should then describe the role that the future principal will be expected to assume, and finally should specify the human characteristics and professional competencies that applicants should possess.

With this groundwork complete, the best qualified candidates can be actively sought. College placement services, Lund notes, are often very helpful in identifying top-notch candidates. "Do not, however, confine your college search only to those schools with top-ranked educational administration programs," Lund cautions.

Preliminary screening should be done by the superintendent or an assistant. The fifteen best qualified candidates should then be interviewed by an "internal screening committee." After receiving the committee's recommendations, which should include "a narrative on each candidate" specifying "the basis for recommendation," the superintendent should select the finalists. After a visit to the schools of the finalists (if applicable) and a return visit of each finalist to the hiring district, the superintendent should recommend one individual to the board.

The final choice is, of course, the responsibility of the superintendent. But it behooves the superintendent, says Lund, to involve all major constituent groups in the selection process. Besides the potential for better decisions, the involvement of others enhances the goodwill and support of constituents and provides the opportunity for candidates to clearly assess the expectations and demands of the position.

6 **McIntyre, Kenneth E.** "The Way It Was/Is. Chautauqua '74: The Remaking of the Principalship. Viewing the Selection Process." *National Elementary Principal,* 53, 5 (July-August 1974), pp. 30-34. EJ 102 549.

Back in the mid-1960s, McIntyre and many other educators were becoming "completely disenchanted" with the most commonly used methods of principal selection: interviews, letters of recommendations, and rating scales. "Since then," says McIntyre, "I have become even more skeptical of their predictive validity, if that is possible."

Most research "indicates that interviewing is practically worthless as a means of revealing reliable estimates of future behavior." When administrators are told of this research, they usually remain complacent: they assume that they—alone among others—"have a knack for instant psychoanalysis." Letters of recommendation—whose authors are chosen by the candidates—"are probably of even less value." And rating scales, says McIntyre, have a variety of problems that limit their predictive value.

Since the 1960s, some newer approaches to principal selection have become more prevalent, though none is really "new" and none is a panacea. Most of these selection procedures are based on the premise that the best predictors of future behavior in a given situation are present and past behaviors in similar situations.

Thus, those in the position of selecting future principals should decide, first, what situations these principals will encounter and what behaviors are desired in these situations. Then, *several* people who have seen the candidate in action in these situations should be interviewed in person or by phone.

Another promising approach is the use of simulation exercises, such as are now being used in assessment centers. Although simulation "is not the 'real thing'," says McIntyre, "it is by definition *like* the 'real thing'." McIntyre also describes a five-phase selection process he helped develop for the Dallas schools and discusses the participation of teachers, parents, and students in the selection process.

7 **McKay, A. Bruce, and McCord, Robert G.** "Consider This Neat Little Way to Size Up Your Would-Be Principals." *American School Board Journal,* 165, 4 (April 1978), p. 37. EJ 175 690.

The "Peter Principle" states that employees will be promoted in an organization until they reach their level of incompetence. These authors ask, "Is the 'Peter Principle' at work in your school system? Are some of your principals former hotshot teachers who have discovered that running a school and teaching in a classroom are two very different occupations?"

To make sure that this principle does not operate in the Montgomery County (Maryland) school system, candidates for the principalship (usually assistant principals) are asked to participate in a

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two-day program at the district's "assessment center." Besides helping district administrators identify candidates with the skills needed to be successful principals, the assessment center gives "candidates and the district's administrators a chance to get to know each other" and provides "candidates with an opportunity to judge their own performance and improve their job skills."

During the two-day program, four main exercises are conducted. In "the principal's problem," a group of six candidates analyzes a "typical problem facing school principals" and then drafts an outline of their proposed solution. Evaluators judge candidates on their problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills.

In another exercise, candidates view a fifteen-minute videotape of a teacher's lesson, analyze the lesson, prepare a strategy for a teacher conference, and then meet with the teacher. "During the process," say the authors, "assessors note a candidate's specific skills in lesson plan and analysis and judge the candidate's ability to conduct a teacher conference." The other main exercises are a ten-minute oral presentation on an assigned topic, and an "in-basket exercise," in which candidates are given a packet of materials and are asked to "assign priorities, make recommendations," and "supply a rationale for each suggested action."

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8 **Meese, Mary Lou.** "Superintendents Who Shoot from the Hip on Hiring Decisions Sometimes Blow Off Their Own Toes." *American School Board Journal,* 168, 9 (September 1981), pp. 40-41. EJ 251 024.

Superintendents who hire administrators impulsively—without consulting important others in the district—sometimes make brilliant choices. Just as often, though, says Meese, they hire "smooth-talking, savvy-but-incompetent opportunists" whose presence is felt, and regretted, "long after their departure from the school system."

A promising alternative to this unilateral and thus unpredictable method of hiring administrators is to spread the responsibility for hiring among a group of district personnel and clients. Meese here describes one such committee-based system, which has been successfully utilized in the Bedford (New York) public school district.

Once the application deadline for a position has passed, a small group of administrators screens the candidates' application materials to make sure they meet the basic requirements of the job. Remaining applicants are then interviewed by a thirteen- to seventeen-member committee. Included in the committee are administrators, parents, "representatives of various academic disciplines and instruction levels," and representatives from the teacher association.

The committee's interviewing process is highly structured. Following a one-hour interview with each candidate, committee members rate the applicant according to predetermined criteria, explain their perceptions of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, and then discuss the candidate with the superintendent. After all candidates have been interviewed, committee members select their top six choices and then explain their ratings to the committee.

Finally, the top three to five finalists are interviewed by the superintendent and two other administrators. The superintendent then makes the final decision.

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9 "NASSP's Assessment Center." A six-article special feature. *NASSP Bulletin,* 64, 438 (October 1980), pp. 87-117. EJ 232 080—EJ 232 084.

"Persons are promoted into higher positions because of whom they know, not what they know."

This old cliche' describes the workings of the administrative hiring process in many school systems. But by using an "assessment center" approach, as described by the six articles in this issue of *NASSP Bulletin,* the "old boy" system of administrator selection and evaluation can be replaced by a system based on objective evaluations of specific administrative skills.

The introductory article of this group describes the "NASSP Assessment Center Project" and the assessment center process. The next four articles—written by "assessors" who were trained by the NASSP and by participants in the centers—describe the overwhelmingly positive experiences of four of the districts that have set up their own assessment centers. A final article describes preliminary research aimed at validating the effectiveness of assessment centers.

In a working assessment center, twelve participants (often aspiring administrators) are observed for two days by six assessors as they perform a variety of specially designed activities. Performance in the activities is used to assess skills in twelve areas, such as problem analysis, organizational ability, leadership, personal motivation, educational values, and written communication skills. The assessors, after discussing and rating each participant's skills, write a comprehensive report and then share their findings with each participant in a private feedback session.

The evaluations developed by the assessment centers have already been used to help make hiring decisions, with the districts reporting "great satisfaction with the quality of the school administrator selected as a result of superior performance in the center." Ancillary benefits of the centers have also been noted. Assessors uniformly report that they are better administrators because of their involvement; districts can be more honest with potential candidates because of their objective appraisal; and participants, often for the first time, receive candid and direct appraisal of their performance and potential

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10 **Newberry, Alan J. H.** "What Not to Look for in an Elementary School Principal." *National Elementary Principal,* 56, 4 (March/April 1977), pp. 41-44. EJ 157 041.

Currently used practices for selecting elementary school principals, says Newberry, are "often unsystematic," "based on myths," and "unsupported by research." Together, these irrational approaches have created no less than "a crisis in the selection of elementary school principals."

Numerous studies have been conducted, however, to determine reliable practices and criteria for selecting quality principals. Newberry here reviews the findings of these studies and suggests that school districts use them as the basis for a rational, research-based

system of principal selection.

Six factors have been clearly identified as having "no validity" in predicting future success in the principalship. Length of previous teaching experience, for example, is not significantly related to administrative success. "That a good teacher makes a good administrator," says Newberry, is "a highly simplistic notion" that is unsupported by research. Other factors unsupported as predictors of administrative effectiveness are the number of undergraduate and graduate courses completed, sex, marital status, and age of the candidate.

Newberry goes on to suggest several personal and professional criteria that would serve as a better basis for principal selection. He admits, though, that "further research is needed to determine the validity" of these criteria. Personal criteria Newberry suggests include intelligence, group skills, success in academic pursuits, mature judgment, good health, and personal security. Professional criteria include skills in human relations, communication, community relations, decision-making, research, curriculum development, implementing change, and technical administration.

School systems should develop strategies to measure these criteria, Newberry concludes, using "a combination of interview forms, biographical data forms, applicant testing, and reference checks." Included are several interview questions that could be used to test some of these criteria.

11 **Rosser, Phyllis.** "Women Fight 'Old Boys' for School Administrator Jobs." *Learning*, 8, 7 (March 1980), pp. 31-32, 34. EJ 231 164.

In 1928, when educational administration was considered a respectable female profession, 55 percent of elementary principals were women. Today, however, only 18 percent of the nation's elementary principalships are held by women. The statistics for secondary principalships and superintendencies are even lower: 3 percent and less than 1 percent, respectively. "What happened to women's role in running the show?" Rosser asks. "And what can be done to restore it?"

The causes of the decrease in women administrators are many and are tied to such events as the Great Depression, the return of veterans to the work force after the war, and the social climate of the 1950s and early 1960s. During the 1970s, the women's movement raised women's career aspirations, but by that time, "women faced a job market that had ceased expanding and that had fallen under control of a system known as the 'old boys network'." Male administrators and even visiting book salesmen, says Rosser, pass the word about openings in nearby districts before the job notices are ever posted, so women rarely get a fair chance.

To break into administrative positions, women must learn how the hiring game works and how to play it to their advantage. Actual decisions about whom to hire are often strongly influenced by recommendations from friends and acquaintances who are part of the network. Thus, potential women administrators should attempt to get recognized and recommended by traditional network members, or they should plug into what Rosser calls the "new girls network." Rosser explains several approaches to gaining entry to these informal networks and describes several programs designed to increase the selection of women for administrative positions.

12 **Tesolowski, Dennis G., and Morgan, Thomas E.** "Selecting Educational Administrators: The Assessment Center Technique." *NASSP Bulletin*, 64, 433 (February 1980), pp. 107-15. EJ 216 000.

School boards usually use one of four techniques for selecting educational administrators. In the "personal preference" method, selection is based on "an implicit feeling of the board and is conditioned by board biases, prejudices, and values." In the "background approach," the work histories of potential managers are closely examined to see if they resemble the histories of successful managers. And in both the "internal characteristics approach" and the "skills approach," tests of aptitudes and skills are used to predict future successes.

"None of these selection methods is valid when utilized alone," state Tesolowski and Morgan. The selection of good managers is a complex task and requires an indepth assessment of both knowledge and attitudes. This indepth analysis can be provided by "a relatively new industrial selection procedure" that is "unbiased, reliable, and more accurate than most other systems."

In the assessment center technique, as this procedure is known, managerial candidates are engaged in a variety of "real-life" situations while their skills and performances are recorded by a number of trained evaluators. Using a number of evaluators, the authors explain, tends to cancel out "gross errors" in the selection process.

Assessment centers use a variety of techniques to assess administrative competence. Extensive interviews are used to gain insights into candidates' attitudes, values, and development. "Leaderless group exercises" are used to assess interpersonal skills. "Business game" and in-basket exercises test administrative competence. And various written tests assess skills, attitudes, and general knowledge.

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-78-0007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.

Prior to publication, this manuscript was submitted to the Association of California School Administrators for critical review and determination of professional competence. The publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of the Association of California School Administrators.

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